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SUBJECT: TURKEY: DTP'S YEAR OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

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Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

11. (C) Summary and comment. The results of the 2007 parliamentary elections raised hopes that Turkey could achieve progress on the Kurdish issue. Some 20 pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) MPs, elected as independents in districts throughout the Southeast, gave the party parliamentary representation for the first time in over a decade. However, hopes this would translate into progress on Turkey's Kurdish problem soured quickly. Military operations against the terrorist PKK in northern Iraq weakened party moderates vis-a-vis hardliners, according to some. If the experiment of Kurdish nationalist participation in Turkey's parliament continues, DTP will be unable to translate its electoral strength in the Southeast into concrete results as long as it leaves unresolved the connection to the PKK that is its strength -- and great weakness. End summary and comment.

Sour Relations with AKP, GOT

13. (C) The sense of opportunity that accompanied DTP's July 2007 debut in parliament dissipated in a matter of days. Despite a dramatic hand-shake between DTP leader Ahmet Turk and far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli at parliament's opening, the pillars of the Turkish establishment, the military and the judiciary, did not accept the legitimacy of DTP's presence in parliament. The military labeled DTP deputies as PKK representatives and refuses to include them in official functions. The judiciary continues to harass DTP officials with lawsuits for using Kurdish language or for attaching the honorific "sayin" (sic) to imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's name. While most cases have resulted in symbolic penalties or acquittals, Abdullah Demirbas, a Diyarbakir sub-mayor, was removed from office for offering city services in multiple languages, including Kurdish. In November 2007 the chief prosecutor filed an indictment with the Constitutional Court calling for DTP's closure for being a "focal point of activities against the sovereignty of the state and indivisible unity of the country and the nation" in violation of the constitution. The case is expected to conclude in the fall.

14. (C) Nationalist Kurds' relations have also deteriorated with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, once regarded as an ally because PM Erdogan portrayed the Kurdish issue as part of AKP's broader democracy agenda and won sympathy for resisting the

military's desire to launch attacks on PKK cells in northern Iraq. Now many Kurds fault Erdogan for endorsing cross-border operations. Instead of being seen as a victim of the Turkish establishment, he is viewed as a coward or a collaborator. Similarly, DTP politicians believe Erdogan and AKP's interest in cultivating ties with Kurds in southeastern Turkey is motivated by a desire to politically dominate the region, including vis-a-vis the DTP, rather than addressing the DTP version of nationalist Kurds' political agenda. As evidence of the ruling party's hostile intentions, a DTP-affiliated web-site claimed that in March, AKP issued instructions to local officials stating that government policy is to "assimilate" Kurds and that attempts to establish Kurdish-medium education are tantamount to separatism. Despite its perceived betrayal of Kurdish political aspirations, AKP retains a strong base of support in the Southeast thanks to its economic development achievements and Islamic leanings.

DTP: Hawks and Doves

¶ 15. (C) DTP supporters contend pressure on the party from AKP and the bureaucratic establishment, coupled with military operations, have strengthened hard-liners within their movement and perpetuated the cycle of violence. Hisyar Ozsoy, an academic who served as an advisor to Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, wrote that as DTP is ostracized by the GOT, "confrontational" groups inside DTP grow stronger and its supporters "increasingly tend to ignore civilian politics and view the PKK as the only hope for Kurds." Baydemir told us he thought Erdogan's 2005 speech in Diyarbakir) when he

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famously acknowledged the Kurdish problem) created an opportunity for progress, but AKP's negative approach since and the continuing military confrontations have strengthened the PKK. Baydemir lamented that those who want a peaceful solution are being squeezed by the Turkish military on one side and the PKK on the other. "If you reject violence, you need to show people another path, but the continuing clashes will damage people's faith in a democratic and non-violent solution."

¶ 16. (C) In recent months the friction between hard-liners and moderates (inevitably dubbed "hawks" and "doves" by the media) has spilled into the open (reftels). In November 2007, following weeks of vicious PKK cross-border attacks on Turkey, Ahmet Turk was removed as DTP chairman and replaced by Nurretin Demirtas, an unseasoned hard-line activist who has since been forced to resign after being convicted of evading Turkish military service. In May, during a visit to northern Iraq, Turk reportedly said continuing PKK violence is harmful to the interests of Kurds and the party should distance itself from Ocalan. Though he quickly claimed he was misquoted, Turk was removed from his position as head of DTP's parliamentary group and replaced by Emine Ayna, known as a member of the pro-Ocalan camp. Re-elected as party co-chair with Ayna at DTP's July 20 party convention, Turk said the time for arms has passed.

¶ 17. (C) While state and military pressure has likely fortified radical sentiments within Kurdish politics, many of DTP's wounds are self-inflicted. Observers of the Kurdish movement say DTP's inner turmoil and confused messages mirror fissures within the PKK itself, which has multiple power centers: the insurgents in northern Iraq; the fund-raisers in Western Europe; and Ocalan, who nominally leads the movement from his prison cell. While the PKK now professes moderate goals (a quasi-federal state for Turkey, increased linguistic and cultural rights for Kurds), its continued use of violence and terrorism contradicts and drowns out the voices of Kurdish nationalist moderates. The violence also fuels nationalist sentiments in western Turkey, curbing the appetite of GOT leaders to undertake politically risky initiatives on the Kurdish issue.

¶8. (C) According to Aliza Marcus, author of a book on the PKK, the military wing's influence on DTP has been getting stronger in recent years. DTP's new leadership generation grew up with the PKK's dominance as a fact of life (older Kurdish activists came from leftist politics and tend to be more independent), and the PKK has institutionalized its role by putting "political commissars" in the middle ranks of the DTP to monitor and guide its activities. The candidate selection process for the 2007 election showed the PKK's heavy hand. Then-DTP chairman Turk favored forming alliances with other Kurdish parties and recruiting talented independents. One potential candidate, Diyarbakir Bar Association Chairman Sezgin Tanrikoglu, told us Turk invited him to be a candidate but the PKK removed him from consideration. "Based on my discussions with the DTP about my candidacy," he said, "it was clear that they do not want independent thinkers in their group. They wanted obedient servants."

What's Next?

¶9. (C) DTP has been dealt a bad hand)- it has only 21 deputies in parliament and has been shunned by the establishment)- and played it poorly by internal bickering and being seen as PKK apologists. DTP's next challenge will likely be reorganizing itself if closed by the Constitutional Court, as many here expect (refC). One party official told us he is 100% certain DTP will be closed; the party is already registering a successor, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which according to media reports has already registered in 35 provinces. If there is an AKP closure-induced general election, DTP or its heir might do better than in July 2007, when AKP carried most of the Southeast. Some tell us DTP's ban may produce a period of creative destruction during which the party could fragment, allowing the hawks and doves to go their separate ways. But Diyarbakir-based free-lance journalist Yilmaz Akinci does not believe a split is likely in the near future, as the moderates would be unable to win many votes and could risk retribution from the PKK. The idea of accelerating Kurdish

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politics into the post-PKK era is inviting, but it will take considerable time and skillful leadership by Ankara and leaders in the region to displace the PKK as the most powerful force in Kurdish nationalism. While DTP and its potential successors will remain the first or second most popular party (along with AKP) in southeastern Turkey, its ability to help resolve the Kurdish issue will remain hostage to the continuing conflict between the PKK and the GOT.

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WILSON